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HOW TO LOOK AT A PICTURE.

THE following article was published in *The Studio and Musical Review*, a paper issued for a number of weeks in 1881. The writer's explication of the proper consideration of this matter will be interesting and valuable to our readers:

It is not with the desire to lay down laws, but to point out principles, that the following hints are written. These principles of seeing have not been forced upon our public, though generally recognized by professional artists. Even critics in this country seem frequently to have neglected them. As new generations of picture-seers and picture-buyers come upon the scene, the same guides need to be offered, and as *The Studio* hopes to help the young by its counsel, as well as win the old by its well-balanced judgments, the suggestions contained in this paper may not be out of place.

The first principle that is to be noted is that of the proper focal distance to be chosen when looking at a painting or drawing. The natural distance for a normal eye is conceded to be three times the diagonal of the picture. The principle can be easily verified. Take a carte-de-visite photograph and hold it near the eye, then distance it until, without moving the eye-ball in the socket, you can comfortably include the whole picture in your field of vision; then measure the distance at which you are holding the card from the eye, and the chances are that you will find the measurement related to the diagonal of the card as three is to one. To see a figure six feet high properly, one needs to be eighteen away. Here we have a hint for the placing of pictures in a room so that they may have an acceptable focal distance; and here, too, we have a guide to a solution of the question of finish.

It is doubtless true that nature is perfectly finished, even under the microscope. but a work of art must simply *appear* to be finished at some well understood focal distance. It seems reasonable, then, to make that perfect appearance coincide with the natural focal measurement of the healthy vision of the average spectator.

Visitors to our galleries have formed bad habits by misunderstanding the aim of a good work of art. This is to impress us as a whole with some sentiment of beauty or grandeur, inspire us or delight us, or even disgust us sometimes; but the impression must be produced, else in so far the work fails. Every detail consistent with the development of the feeling in the spectator which inspired the artist should, at the chosen distance, look perfect. It matters not how the result is brought about when we come to examine it closely, if the purpose for which it was introduced is fulfilled where all the other parts are in harmony with it. A blotchy daub a foot square that assumes no shape until we have crossed the gallery, is as false in method as the other extreme of a canvas six feet across which means nothing to us when we are more than six feet away and can, consequently, see perfectly but two feet of its surface, and must take it in by thirds.

As artists have so often neglected this rule, which may be assumed to be a law of vision, it is not surprising that the public is confused in its manner of examining the works of our painters. Even hanging committees, who are supposed to consult the best interests of artists and the public, fail in this respect, and frequently force us to smell of huge works, and banish to the upper regions small masterpieces which, if worthy a place on the walls, one would think might be placed where they could be seen. But until we have gutta-percha rooms elastic enough to give the aspirants for fame a place on the line, these much-to-be-desired attentions will not be paid.

J. W. C.

IN the June number of the ART UNION, President Huntington of the National Academy will contribute an article on the Prado galleries of Madrid, A. J. Conant will discuss various art matters of current interest, and the long deferred article on the Philadelphia Academy schools will also be given a place.

INFLUENCE AND INDIVIDUALITY.

SOME FURTHER CONVERSATION WITH WILLIAM HART.

THE remarks of Mr. William Hart—published in a former number of THE ART UNION—concerning the copying of an artist's methods by his pupils—appear to have been appreciated more by artists than by critics. The difficulty with the average critic has been that he has made no distinction between the legitimate influence of the master, shown in the pupil's work, and the downright copying of the former by the latter. In a conversation with Mr. Hart a few days ago, he recurred to the subjects of our former conversation, and among other things, said:

"What an abused word 'school' is, in its artistic application! I am profoundly grateful that there is no 'school,' in the commonly accepted sense, in this country, save the sorry importations from Paris and Munich. It has always seemed to me that the total absence of 'school' in England was very much to the credit of English art, and spoke volumes for the honesty and sincerity of the English artists.

"An artist reasons upon art from the recollection of the pictures he has seen, the men he has known and from his own experience. I could not treat the question of 'Influence and individuality' abstractly, and discuss it from some point away up in the clouds, as do the great art critics, I must take an artist, a great one, and analyze his career.

"Suppose we take Turner, the great English artist. He began with terrible obstacles in his way, and by conquering these, one by one, he made himself the great artist that he was. Reading his early history, we are sorry for him; we are surprised at the stupidity of the world that did not instantly recognize him. But hold! we are wrong; our sorrow is misplaced; his hard experiences were the rubs that polished the diamond and gave it that transcendent lustre which we associate with the name of Turner. Yet, this only in part; besides the original genius in the poor barber boy, there was much hearty art food that he devoured and assimilated. How does the stalwart six-foot man come from the puny babe? Simply from the food he has digested throughout the years, and which has built him up. It is so with the artist. If he can assimilate, he can grow. If he cannot, he will remain an art-babe to the end of his days. I can recall many art-babes who were prodigies at seventeen, yet who never grew an inch afterwards. They could not assimilate, and hence remained stationary in art.

"Turner had a prodigious appetite. He fed lustily on many things. If I could give a list of all the works he ever painted, I could name the art-food he was assimilating through the different periods of his life. In the earlier portion of his career, his associate, Girtin, had a great influence upon him. There was a depth in Girtin's work of which Turner was not capable at that time, and the latter, either consciously or unconsciously, began to copy that which he admired in the work of his contemporary. Turner and Girtin were born the same year, yet it has always seemed to me as if Girtin must have had the nature of an older man than his friend, to whom it is my fancy to regard him